TSC Research Bulletin

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The Sheffield Centre

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Our theme, '**synagogue to marketplace**', links to the mindset of the gathered church calling people in, to a community of dispersed missionaries going and starting something new. This view is not to replace what we have, but to see an essential part of the church reborn.

We have a guest article from Bob Hopkins, a good friend and colleague who has written a response to my article *Danger Planting* in our previous bulletin. We thank Bob for his vigorous response, and are glad to model openness of debate so that our understanding can grow, being open to new insights *and* holding to the best of previous thinking.

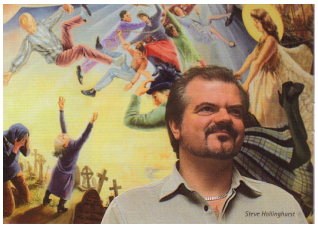
George Lings, November 2008

From synagogue to marketplace

Crossing cultures in mission with Paul

Paul's mission had a clear strategy: go first to the synagogue to preach about Jesus, to an audience of Jews and Gentile 'God fearers'. Paul's evangelistic message of Jesus as the Messiah fulfilling Jewish prophecy relied on his hearers knowing the Jewish faith.

Most Gentiles however were Pagans. Paul's first address to them comes unintentionally in Lystra after a crippled man is healed. The crowd think he and Barnabas are Greek gods in human form and want to make offerings to them. Paul tells them instead to worship the living God; drawing his message from nature, not Jewish scriptures they wouldn't know. In relating their Pagan beliefs to God as creator he used the Jewish response to Canaanite Paganism; seeing the different gods as ways of speaking about the different actions and attributes of the one true God. The account suggests Paul wasn't finding this easy.



Steve Hollinghurst

In Athens, after preaching in the synagogue, Paul deliberately goes to the marketplace to speak with Pagans and Greek philosophers. They call him a *spermalogos,* someone speaking about things they don't understand.

Paul could speak eloquently about Jesus in the synagogue, but in the marketplace he struggled as he had in Lystra. However, he was learning from the daily discussions and visits to Pagan temples. So when he speaks at the Areopagus, he strengthens his message drawn from nature with what he has learnt. So he mentions the statue to an unknown god he has seen as an attempt to seek the true creator God. Such a God ,he argues, cannot be properly represented by idols or contained by temples. This Jewish idea was shared by Greek philosophers like Euripides and Plato. Paul also uses quotations from the Pagan poets Epimenides and Aratus in praise of Zeus; not as the traditional member of the pantheon, but as the supreme being of philosophy. Paul is using Pagan religion and Greek philosophy he has learnt to speak about God to this non-Jewish audience. The effects are not as great as when he speaks to Jews, but some believe - including a leading member of the Areopagus - and the first Pagan Christian community is born.

If Paul's mission strategy was based around the synagogue and a message for those who knew Judaism, in Christendom ours has been based around the church and a message for those who knew Christianity. As this knowledge fades from our society **we need to go out into the marketplaces and temples of our world in mission**. Like Paul we will find we cannot use the message we preached in Christendom. Instead we must listen to the beliefs and ideas of non-Christians, assuming God will speak to us through them and show us ways to communicate our faith in their culture. This is harder than preaching to those raised in the faith, its fruit too will come slower, but the alternative is to confine our faith to a Christendom ghetto.

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The Sheffield Centre team are:

George Lings, Steve Hollinghurst, Laurence Keith, Andrew Wooding, Claire Dalpra, Mike Collyer and associate member Peter Hallsworth.

Affirm planting! ~ Bob Hopkins

This article is an invited response to George's article 'Danger Planting', from research bulletin no.2 summer 2008.

Most readers will know that George and I are great friends and often stimulate one another's thinking on mission and church. But I couldn't rejoice over George's 'Danger Planting' article in the last edition, despite passionately sharing his core concern to minimise the failure rate in planting fresh expressions of church, recognising the significant human cost involved.

I also wholeheartedly endorse George's opening references to Paul Minear and his observation that 'the New Testament is full of images of the church, but never any definitions'. I believe that it is this reality that should lead us to tenaciously hold to the biblical diversity of images rather than setting some over or even against others. Only keeping all the facets, each conveying distinct insights, can we glimpse the full picture.

And it's precisely this that leads me to contend that, far from being 'one that is out of keeping with the New Testament images' as George suggests, Jesus repeatedly used pictures from agriculture. And the imagery of planting was one of the two that Paul uses for his initiating new expressions of church (1 Cor 3:5-17). So, on the one hand we don't have the choice to dismiss or warn against planting pictures as George seems to, and on the other hand we should note that in precisely this passage where Paul links planting and building language, he emphasises the heavy responsibility involved, for 'each should be careful how he builds … his work will be revealed … fire will test the quality of each mans work'. So I see absolutely no room biblically to associate agricultural pictures with glib and reckless mission approaches as George does, using some quite emotive language including 'cot deaths'.

Bob & George

Furthermore, I think it incredible to suggest that whenever poor leadership of either permission givers or pioneers has contributed to the failure of mission and planting, that this has had anything whatever to do with the language that has been used to describe the endeavour! Drawing on our own study and that of others, we wrote up a list of factors contributing to planting weaknesses in the booklet 'Planters Problems' (available at the online store on www.acpi.org.uk) and the language used is not among them.

I also question George's implication that entrepreneurial planters are counting people as dispensable, with a primary concern for success. He compares leaders to politicians and generals behind the lines, sending the foot soldiers to their doom. Firstly, I observe that it's largely the pioneers and entrepreneurs that are motivated themselves to take the risks and move out of the safe havens of inherited church. Secondly, George's language here seems to me not to honour the countless missionaries who willingly laid down their lives for the 'privilege' of spreading the gospel. And we know many church planters in the west today who have seen their efforts die, and who feel the pain and disappointment of that death and how it has impacted those who have joined them in the adventure.

I would suggest that entrepreneurial innovation is a common expression of pioneer apostolic ministry, and without it we would still be stuck with a monoculture of inherited church and an environment that was deeply risk-averse. The recovery of this gift is one of the main recommendations of the *Mission shaped Church* report of which George was a principle author. And whilst I share the concern that it be complemented by the pastoral gift, I am thrilled to see that at last those with the apostolic, risk-embracing gift are being recognised and enabled in our church.

Bob Hopkins, November 2008

From synagogue to marketplace

Disturbances to inherited ecclesiology (George Lings)

The theme across this issue set me thinking about some present disturbances to inherited ecclesiology. From Acts onwards this disruption seems normal in times of fresh missional engagement, a process brought to birth by the missionary Spirit. That kind of view is taken by John V. Taylor in the first half of his 1972 work *The Go-between God*, where the chapter headings move from conception to birth, as he explores the pregnant disturbance that comes from the Spirit in relation to mission.

Here are some contours of the disturbance. Synagogue tends to emphasise church mission as 'come to us', whereas marketplace necessitates some level of 'go'. I think these two are not fundamentally opposed, as those who have *gone* to the marketplace will then invite others to *come*; to join them, to discover Jesus and to step forward into life transformation through him. This in turn, over time, will likely lead to *going* to yet another different setting, at the impulse of the Spirit.

Continued overleaf...

George continued...

Synagogue also underlines gathering. It resonates well with images of Jesus' followers as a city on a hill or being light on a stand; these should be visible, large enough, attractive and attractional. But presence in the market-place restores the other dimension that he also endorsed which is dispersal. The images of salt, yeast and seeds draw attention to thinly spread, apparently hidden and yet potent, positive and subversive forces. Why should ecclesiology mainly endorse the former set?

Beyond synagogue, temple carries further connotations of power, controlling influence and being in the majority – to which properly behaved outsiders can receive a welcome and limited access. But in a secular marketplace, we find ourselves as minority, one voice among many, vulnerable and looking weak. Those who argue that our day is more marked by exile, when synagogue was invented, or who note the terms of the sending of the 72 in Luke 10 or Paul's views from 2 Corinthians, may find being in the marketplace fits. Yet Roland Allen noted that marketplace is also the source of fertile growth. Its material and intel-lectual wealth makes it a potential centre of evangelistic life. But he holds it should not be a great prison that holds people, but rather a great railway station that sends them out.

Growing church among the marketplace also makes plain that a simplistic sacred/secular divide is false. Rather our call is to practice a dynamic tidal rhythm between being engaged in *mission* and sustained by *monastery*. Mission, community and spirituality need to be held in tension. None is a replacement for another.

Marketplace also leads to another dynamic that synagogue finds hard if not impossible to engender. Part of our new learning is that we do not so much recruit people out of their culture and bring them back to church culture. Rather, with them, we grow church in that culture. But inculturation itself does not make explicit that here the reproductive is at work. **The task is to be in the market-place not so much for amending the existing, but bringing to birth what was not**. This is not so much a church learning to wear new clothes, but to give birth to new life. That life will inherit church DNA but also derive life from its context. Here the incarnation is the best underpinning of such a bipartite process. If we affirm within orthodoxy that Jesus had the DNA of God the Son and also of Mary, we have ample precedent.

I find these disturbances are liberating and life giving.

Where have all the flowers gone?

Mike Collyer CA

'Where Have All The Flowers Gone' is the name of a pop song from the swing-ing sixties by Pete Seeger that still tunes into my mind occasionally some 40 years on. The song goes on to ask: 'Where have all the young girls gone?' and 'Where have all the young men gone?' The Church today is asking 'W*here have all the young people gone*?'

The truth is they have not gone anywhere; they weren't in church in the first place! Recent mission strategies aimed at reaching young people often by default attract people of an older generation. The result is disappointment instead of joy. Older people are perceived as a problem rather a challenge. Older people are not seen as 'cool', to use contemporary language.

In *Mission-shaped Questions,* edited by Steve Croft (Church House Publishing 2008), Linda Barley, using statistics from the *Churchgoing in the UK, Tearfund 2007* survey, observes that 'In modern-day Britain different generations have very different experiences of church. Strikingly, older people are not only more likely than other generations to be regular churchgoers, but they are also more likely to be de-churched. A quarter of people over retirement age attend church at least once a month while four in ten of the age group are de-churched.' **What must the church do to respond to this challenge?**

It is no longer the case that the boomer generation and those recently retired will return to church as they were not there in the first place. **Running church based activities will not always attract the more active non-churched young old**.

One way forward is for older Christians to evangelise their own peer group by moving into the marketplace from the comfort zone of their usual circle of Christian friends.

I was talking to someone recently who had decided to do just that by joining the local bowls club, leisure centre and even going swimming on a regular basis. Already he has found people of his generation keen to talk about matters of faith. In the bowling club a small fellowship group has developed and a church is beginning to emerge.

I never thought, after 32 years of being an evangelist I'd be getting into 'flower arranging'!

Challenges for the church engaged in mission

Peter Hallsworth

'As the father has sent me so I send you' (Jn, 20:21)

As this challenge has been put to me so I find myself reflecting on the drama recently played out in the media. Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand, two 'edgy' comedians and presenters have been suspended by the BBC with Brand resigning shortly afterwards. The mission of the BBC ('To enrich people's lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain') was helped by Ross and Brand in terms of reaching a wider audience, but did the missional goals of outreach justify the methods? The Director General of the BBC believes not as he recently stated that, in terms of 'entertainment', both Ross and Brand stepped over the mark.

As the church follows the way of Jesus into mission, how do we know that we are not overstepping the mark in our efforts to reach out? Who is going to press the alarm button when we, like the BBC, step over the mark in our attempts to connect with different people groups? I believe that we face precisely the opposite danger. The alarm bells that we could be listening for are those that remind us to progress *towards* an outreach mark (or the ends of the earth), rather than calling us *back* from one.

The call to be 'sent' or to 'go' mirrors the life Jesus who was sent by God. The understanding of a 'sent life' is crucial in the mission of the church which, at best, is a collective of sent lives. Jesus was sent by his father to demonstrate *in a life* that God loves the outsider too – the different ones. Jesus never criticised the thrust of the Jewish covenant code that the Jews were to be a special and holy people called out to represent and serve God in his created order. He didn't because this was his own calling as a Jew. In living out this calling he associated with the so called 'low life' or untouchables. Israel, the people of God, were intended to be the people who would be a light to the whole world demonstrating in words and actions the gentle and just rule of God. Jesus, as a human being, demonstrated that calling in his 'sent life'. *As the father sent Jesus so he sends us.*

The danger of this type of challenge is that we find it all too much and beyond our realistic abilities. Two comments that may help. Although Jesus seemed to live this type of life somewhat single handed he always sent his disciples out in *twos* and also to people who would *listen* - I see no reason to challenge that strategy! More can be achieved through working in teams. Secondly, this is not just human work but the work of the Spirit that spurred Jesus on. William Temple said that no one could reasonably be expected to write like Shakespeare or, indeed, follow after the pattern of Jesus' life. But if the spirit of Shakespeare lived in someone then it would be possible to write like him and if we have the same Spirit that Jesus had then...

If the Spirit inspires our methods then we, unlike the BBC, will not need to draw back but continue pushing out culturally through our Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth – which geographically could be as close as next door!

Peter is an associate of the Sheffield Centre.

Keeping up with the terms...

Claire Dalpra

This September I went back to being a student. Not the heavily in debt, drinking-every-night, full-time undergraduate kind (me? never!). This time round, I am a part-time MA student at Cliff College on their Mission and Emerging Church programme.

I joined my fellow course students for my first block week at the end of September and was forcibly reminded again how much confusion exists over when to call something an 'emerging church' and when to call something a 'fresh expression of church'. In the UK, are these terms merely different ways to describe the same thing?

One guest lecturer offered his understanding of their difference (while admitting a huge amount of crossover in practice). Emerging churches, he commented, are grass roots initiatives that have grown by themselves, without co-ordination, since the early 90s. The term fresh expressions of church, born of the *Mission-shaped Church* report in 2004, describes initiatives more tied to the institution. They are largely existing forms of church seeking to reinvent themselves.

Another guest lecturer offered his present understanding. The language of emerging church, he said, is predominantly used by one kind of fresh expression of church - those that used to be described as alternative worship congregations. By contrast, the term fresh expressions of church seeks to be inclusive of all kinds of new churches, not just alternative worship congregations but network churches, cell churches, café churches, new monastic communities, youth congregations, etc.

It also seems that the differing terminology reflects the difference of opinion over how closely allied to the establishment it is wise to be, over which there is no agreed view. Those using the term 'fresh expressions of church' are usually optimistic about working in partnership with church as institution, seeing mixed economy as a creative missional framework for both new and inherited ways of being church, all in the hope that what began on the margins of the church can positively influence the whole. Conversely, many in the emerging church scene would be happy to cut all ties to what they might see as an institutional sinking Titanic and row away as fast as possible lest they be 'pulled down' also.

Whichever language is used, here at *The Sheffield Centre*, we are aware that the most effective examples of emerging church and fresh expressions are those who have not forgotten the best disciplines of church planting. As we move from synagogue to marketplace as our starting point in mission, lessons learned about developing ecclesial identity, ownership, long-term sustainability and a healthy interdependency with other congregations and churches alongside them will be crucial. This will help us see beyond the goal of mere attendance of new (and not yet) Christians at new attractional events and services to growing sustainable communities made up of people as they embark on longer, deeper journeys of discipleship.

I am not surprised that the terminology gets a bit muddled. It is trying to keep up with a rapidly evolving phenomenon. I suspect we must learn to live with a certain amount confusion and provisionality of phraseology, but seeking clarity.